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AUTHOR Richardson, Elaine
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ABSTRACT

This Powerpoint presentation argues that the problems encountered in implementing African-centered curriculum into the university composition classroom attest to the need for African centered education in kindergarten through university level educational institutions. The solution of the problem of African American students' disproportionate literacy achievement compared to students from the dominant culture is to counteract cultural conflict and use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and culture as the composition curriculum. The Black language and literacy experience in America should be the center of inquiry. Contrasting AAVE discourse, rhetoric, and grammar with academic discourse will result in students' improved writing. Students can become more knowledgeable about language and usage; however, diversity within the African American community brings with it the clash of diverse ideologies and class intersections. To counteract the monocultural influence of the traditional orientation to the making of knowledge or "the powers that be," educators need to "get their heads together"--the "folk head," "working head," and "middle head." (RS)

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The Powers That Be: AAVE As The Composition Curriculum

Elaine Richardson

General College
University of Minnesota

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1. The Powers That Be: AAVE As The Composition Curriculum
   Elaine Richardson
2. Problem
   - African American students' disproportionate literacy achievement--as compared to students from the dominant culture
   - Cultural Conflict
   - Unsituated literacy experiences
3. Solution
   - Counteract Cultural Conflict
   - African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Culture as the Composition Curriculum--African Centered Composition Theory
   - Culturally relevant literacy instruction
4. Theoretical Assumptions
   - The Black language and literacy experience in America is the center of inquiry
   - Literacy learning must be connected with socio-cultural, political and historical reality
5. Practices
   - Contrasting AAVE discourse, rhetoric, and grammar with academic discourse, rhetoric and grammar will result in students' improved writing
   - Heightening historical and cultural self consciousness and critical awareness will translate over into writing improvement
6. Strengths
   - Students become more knowledgeable about language and usage
   - Classroom activity is linked to life, thought and action in the real world
   - Students are rewarded for cultural knowledge
   - Students are encouraged to see themselves as heirs and guardians of the Black literacy tradition
7. Problems
   - Many students have to be debrainwashed
   - Diversity within the African American community brings with it the clash of diverse ideologies and class intersections (folk, working, middle)
8. Folk Head
9. Working Head
10. Middle Head
11. Conclusion (putting our heads together)

Problem

- African American students' disproportionate literacy achievement-- as compared to students from the dominant culture
- Cultural Conflict
- Unsituated literacy experiences

Solution

- Counteract Cultural Conflict
- African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Culture as the Composition Curriculum--African Centered Composition Theory
- Culturally relevant literacy instruction

Theoretical Assumptions

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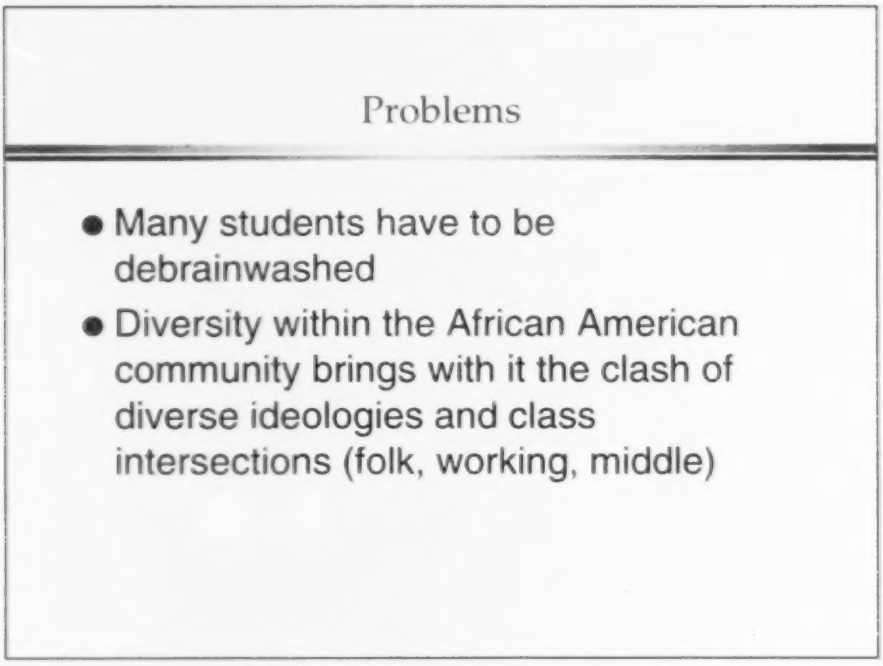
Problems
• Many students have to be debrainwashed
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The curriculum was based in the belief that learning to read the self or a world personally meaningful to the self would enhance critical literacy skills. Implicit in this belief is the assumption that students have an already-formed knowledge-base about themselves. What is immediately apparent to the teacher of such a curriculum is that students do not have a coherent understanding of the Black experience. Many times the overriding already-formed knowledge-base is filled with erroneous information. "Black anything is nothing" is pivotal to a critical understanding of students' interaction with such a curriculum. Most students have a racist text in their heads. The teacher must be armed with the Black literacy tradition to root out twelve or more years of miseducation. The instruction seeks to put our heads together.

African Self Consciousness--Joseph Baldwin

Pre	Post
5.59	5.80 Change of 21%

#2. Black people should have their own independent schools which consider their African heritage and values an important part of the curriculum.

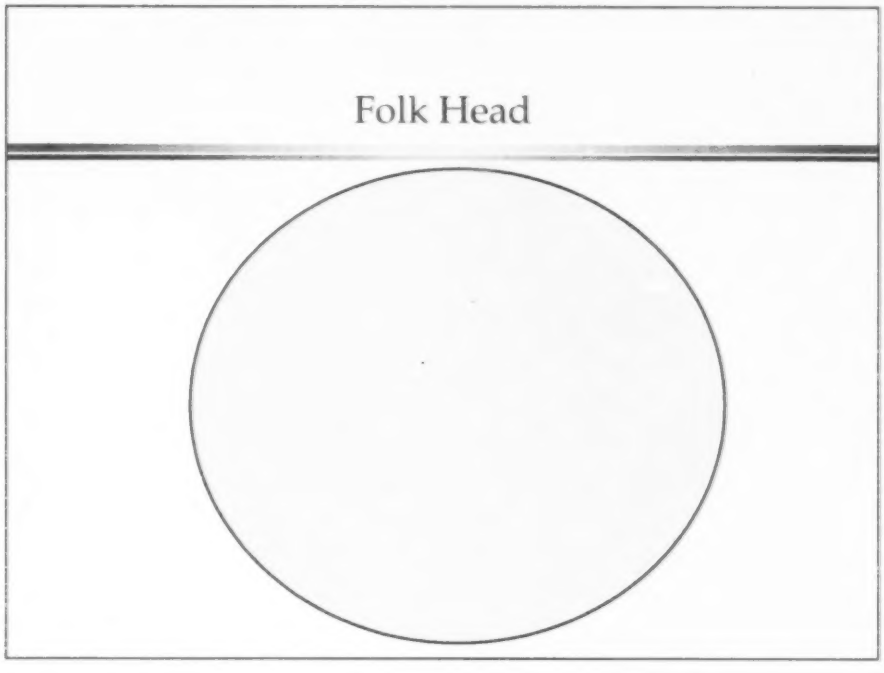
15 students agreed with this statement. 8 students disagreed with this statement.

#21. There is no such thing as African culture among Blacks in America. 4 students disagreed and 19 agreed with this statement.

#36. African culture is better for humanity than European culture.

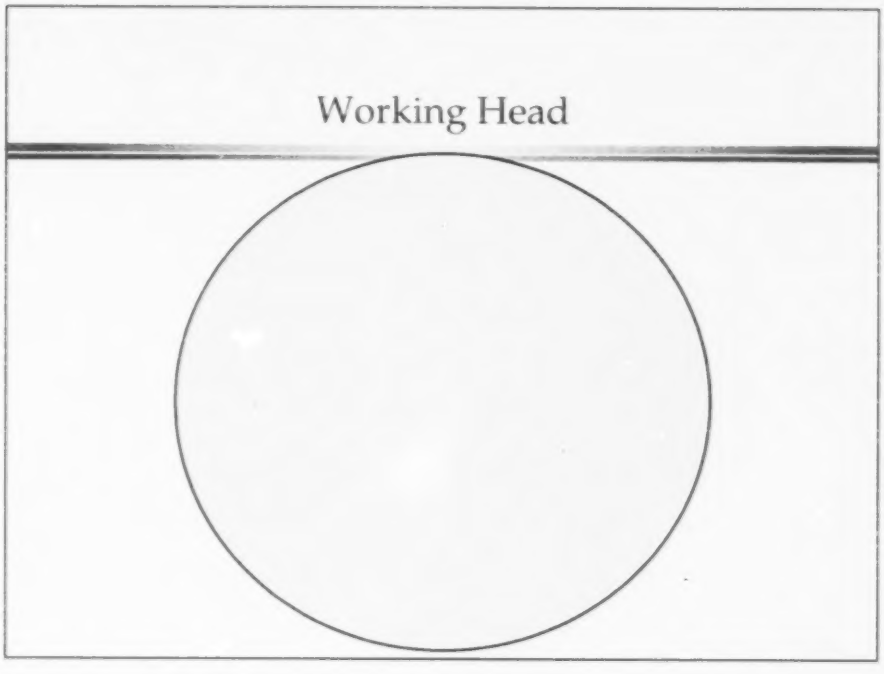
14 students agreed, while 8 disagreed with this statement.

This is a sample of ASC development over fifteen weeks of instruction.



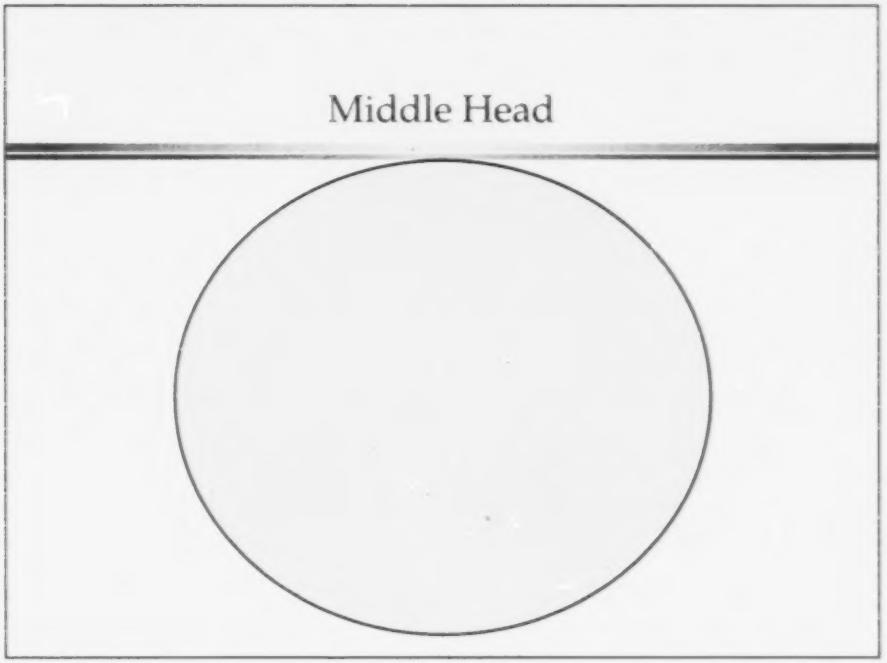
Folk Head

The student who is most closely related to the poor folk tradition has more AAVE at the tip of her tongue. Previous literacy experiences may not have engaged the students' intuitive language and literacy skills. Family may or may not support students' participation in such a course of study. This student may be a less savvy code switcher. Since this student may not have been previously rewarded for vernacular knowledge, student may be more open to study of literacy from a political African Centered perspective.



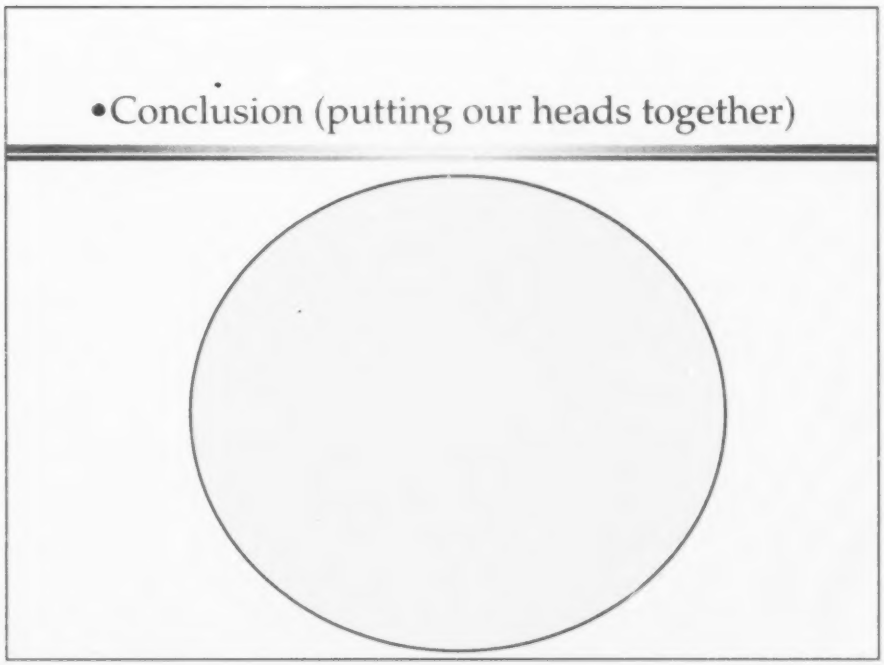
Working Head

Students may be actively involved in AAVE language, cultural traditions and values. Students' family expects that student will transcend their present status. Plays the school game relatively well. However, this student may be more open to study literacy from African Centered perspective, and to see it, as not only, socioculturally, but politically empowering.



Student may identify more with mainstream American culture. Student may see no value in studying the connection between AAVE language, culture and ideology. Perhaps LWC is students' first language. This student has presumably been awarded by previous schooling experience for mastering Eurocentric orientation to knowledge, not just playing the school game but internalizing many of its values that may be eroding African Centered consciousness.

Summary, all of these students have experiences that are needed in the African Centered classroom. The **folk head** offers the perspective of that reality, reminds all of us of our responsibility to those trapped in the hoods--Students contribute to such a course because their use of folk language opens the opportunity to talk about it-- origins and currency, its creativity and functions, and to use it to explore and master LWC. The **working head** models code switching technique--this student's ability to successfully apply vernacular and dominant perspective and interpretation of concepts serves all students. The **middle head** contributes by offering mainstream language perspectives for our inspection, to remind us that ultimately we have responsibility to develop and think about what is best for all of humanity. But such a classroom makes struggle and negotiation the center of the literacy experience. According to Frederick Douglass, There can be no progress without struggle.



The problems encountered in implementing African Centered curriculum into the university composition classroom attest to the need for African Centered education in Kindergarten through university level educational institutions. To counteract the monocultural influence of the traditional orientation to the making of knowledge or "the powers that be" Let us get our heads together.